

# Beyond the Trades —

## Working on the Creative Side

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See *Trades Workshop Notice*, p. 19.

**T**he evolution of the first preservation trades workshop and its community is the product of garnered creativity and sincere compassion expressed by individual tradespeople from around the country interested in exchanging ideas and preservation techniques. The idea to create a community among the preservation trades has come about during discussions with various experts over the years.

It takes a special blend of talent, character and courage to be a tradesperson. The experts of the preservation trades are creative, steadfast individuals confident in their knowledge, skills and abilities of a particular craft. As individuals, they tend to stand tall as genuine role models. It's not enough just to be novel and useful—it takes creativity and leadership. Creativity involves reaching out to other people; it goes beyond the individual—things come together when interacting with others. There is also a critical social dimension necessary for any creative action to be successful. Community is that source of creativity—the diversity and differences found among members of a group stimulates the development of beneficial relationships.

There are three key characteristics of a creative person:

- An essential characteristic is having the expertise in a specific area: skills that represent your basic mastery of a field. For example, to have such skills means that you know how to skillfully use a hand chisel if you're a timber framer, or a trowel if you're a stone mason. Many people have a flair for something. Talent is the natural ability for being able to produce great work in a particular domain. Without training in the skills of a trade, even the most promising talent will languish. But with proper skill development, even an average talent can become an expert.
- The second characteristic is creative thinking skills: ways of approaching the world that allow you to find a novel solution and see it through to completion. These creative thinking skills include being able to imagine a diverse range of possibilities, being persistent in tackling a problem, and having high standards for work. They also include the ability to turn things over in your mind, like trying to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. Many of these skills

have to do with being an independent person, being willing to take risks and having the courage to try something you've never done before.

- The final key element is passion: the urge to do something for the sheer pleasure of doing it rather than for any prize or compensation. Creativity occurs when people are motivated by the pure enjoyment of what they are doing.

The basis for creating the preservation trades workshop is not new—it's called networking. When you get people together with like interests, knowledge and skills—the result is the production of innovative and creative ideas and solutions. Creating an event of this type is just one way of pulling people together. It will provide an opportunity for those logistically not able to network, due to rural locations or time constraints, to exchange the latest information and techniques.

The dynamics of networking are as such: the development of an individual's creative abilities involves a process of taking in new ideas, of being made to think from inside out, or upside down, then trying to reach some compromise to achieve a new solution. Networking is a form of creative processing involving the combination of new and different ideas into a reasonable whole. To remain creative, the individual must keep collecting new information and experiences. Group creativity works in similar ways. Initially, there is a tremendous flurry of activity and an exchange of new ideas and cross-cultural encounters. The group is then confronted with putting all this diversity and complexity together in some harmonious way. What results is a community that enters a "golden age"—it becomes creative and energized and hopefully can use its diversity to develop a unique vision for the future.

### References

Goleman, Daniel, Paul Kaufman and Michael Ray, *The Creative Spirit* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

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